

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE

A Tale of Missionary Life

By Rev. R. W. W. ALEXANDER

THE original Rocky Mountain House was an old Hudson Bay Trading Post on the other side of the Saskatchewan River, of which nothing remains save two old chimneys and a few scattered stones. The present village, which has a population of 300, is on the east side of the river and about one mile north of where the Clearwater River unites with the Saskatchewan, the school being called Confluence in consequence. It is practically a railway town; the C.P.R. and C.N.R. have a union depot here, the C.N.R. a cache and a roundhouse. I came in here just 17 months ago, and am the first ordained Church of England minister to reside here. I set to work to explore the country for miles around, having a district of 6,000 miles to travel in. I have been able to organize three parishes, Holy Trinity, Rocky Mountain House, St. John's, Nordegg, and St. Andrew's, Beaver Flats—a "closed" mining town. Nordegg is fifty-eight miles west on the C.N.R. and consists of a mining town of 1,200 inhabitants. It is a closed town under the management of the mine owners, the Brazeau Collieries, who have their head offices in Toronto. The coal put out of these mines is steam coal of a very fine quality and almost unlimited quantity. I have about 26 Church families there, besides many single hands. I hold service there once a month. The journey up is often tedious, owing to the fact that only mixed trains are run, and also the track having been hastily built, rock-slides and washouts occur. On one occasion it took me ten hours to get there, a huge mass of rock having rolled down in front of the engine.

There will evidently be in time a succession of mines between Nordegg and Rocky Mountain House. At present there are four, a new one at Harlech, eight miles east of Nordegg, then there is Sander's Alberta and Sander's Creek, and a mine just west of these, all supplying good house coal. Little settlements are growing up round each of these, which will soon be small towns.

In the winter time, 17 miles west of here at Horburg, there are huge lumber camps, and thousands of ties are brought out for the railways; over 300 men were working there all winter. At Nordegg itself, there are small lumber camps, from which mine props are cut. Also there is a rock-crushing camp run by the C.N.R. As I endeavour to visit these camps, you can understand the amount of work I have to get through.

In addition to the three organized parishes, I have opened up nine unorganized mission points. These consist of country districts for the most part, with the exception of Eckville, a small village on the C.N.R., where I am endeavouring to build a church and have raised, with the help of my W.A., about \$300. Eckville is 34 miles from here. I have travelled 2,000 miles on horseback in the 17 months. It is the best way to get about here, owing to the large quantity of muskeg in the vicinity. My other points are: Prairie Rose, 22 miles east; Hespero, 26 east; Alhambra, 14 east; Arbutus, 10 east; Clearwater, 7 south-east; Cheddar, 22 south; Evergreen, 32 south-east; and New Hill, 40 south-east. The people in these two last-named places have had no services for five years. I often have to get off my horse and wade through the muskegs knee deep

in mud and water and take services with wet feet.

In the fall and winter I often hold lantern services on week nights in numerous places, which are well attended and enjoyed. I have held these services now during the eight winters I have been out west, sometimes driving, and also carried the outfit 1,500 miles on horseback. I am very much in need of a new acetylene lantern and slide carrier (Baird) as mine is pretty nearly worn out. This prolonged winter, with the deep snow-drifts, made it very bad to travel, but I fulfilled all my appointments with the exception of one, when the sudden thaw came. I had left this early one Saturday morning and rode 24 miles, wading my horse through floods which came up to my ankles sitting on the horse. All the culverts were washed out. I stayed the night at a farmhouse and next day rode on to Eckville. When I got within 1½ miles of the town, there was a huge flood one mile wide on the Medicine Creek. I put my horse into the water till he lost his footing and had to swim and then a man from the railway bridge under which I had to pass shouted to me that it was much worse further on, so I had to turn back and give it up, or I might have lost the horse and got drowned. I went back to a farmhouse and next day baptized five children and rode 25 miles and then home the next day.

Such is life in these western fields, varied and interesting. The Bishop has held one Confirmation here and I have baptized 81. During my eight years in the west I have ridden 20,650 miles horseback and paid 7,700 visits, baptized 500, had many confirmed, built one church at Savoy, raised much money for Red Cross and other war objects with my picture services, been out in all weathers, all temperatures and am looking forward to increased activities in this district, which I have now well in hand, as I now know all the trails and the people.

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